

Activity #8: Heaps, Chains, and Nets

Heaps – The first phase of word meaning

- **Ideas and images are loosely assembled around a word.**

In the early phases of coming to understand word meanings, children's ideas and images are loosely gathered around a word.

- **Children have a "heap" of connections.**

Children "heap" all kinds of ideas around a word. For example, children will think of different things depending on their perceptions and misperceptions of construction.



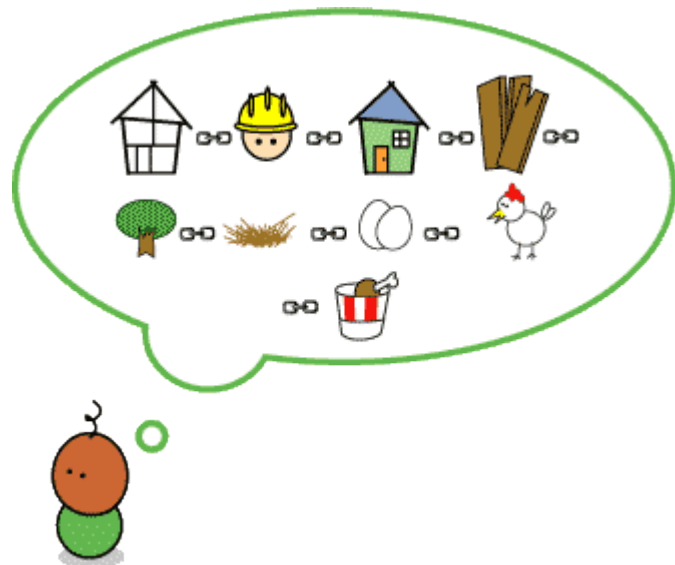
Chains – The second phase of word meaning

- **Ideas and images are joined together by some feature, like links of a chain.**

In the second phase of word learning a chain of meaning is formed. Each link in the chain sparks an idea or image for the next one. So, the meaning at the end may have nothing in common with that at the beginning.

- **For example, see how construction led to fried chicken.**

Construction
Builders
House
Wood
Trees
Nests
Eggs
Chickens
Fried chicken



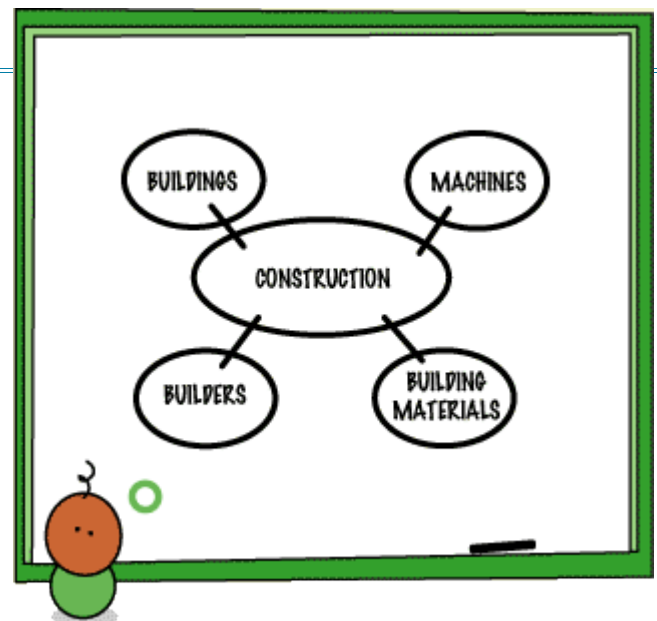
Nets, Part 1: The third phase of word meaning

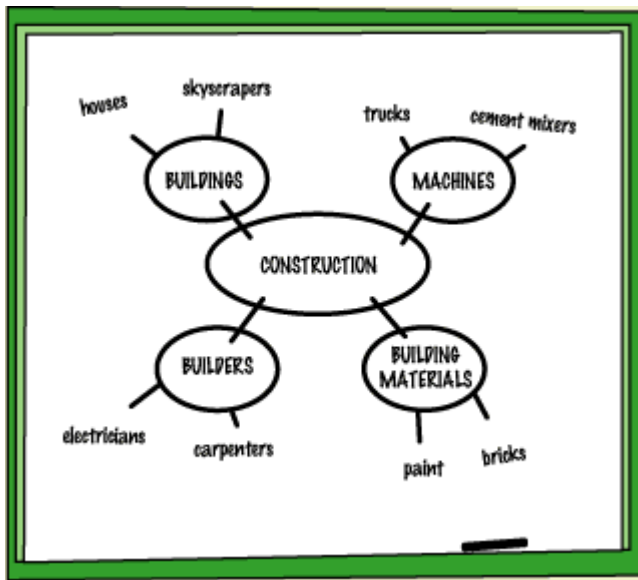
- **Ideas and images are "trapped" around a central organizer.**
Adults help children put their ideas about a topic into a "net."

Through the study of broad topics, the teacher helps the child build vocabulary and language. These topics need to be developed over a period of 4–6 weeks, allowing time for concept building.

- **Ideas and images are organized to show relationships.**

Children are able to "prune" away words that do not fit in the concept "net." Repeated exposure to the words builds knowledge of the world. The teacher is providing an organized way for children to think about a topic. Children are able to organize their experiences and knowledge about a topic around a central theme.





Nets, Part 2: Thinking of subcategories of words

- **Subcategories of related vocabulary words can emerge.**

Young children do not need to see nets organized in this way (it's too complicated), but they can be encouraged to think of words that relate to subcategories.

- **For example, children can be encouraged to think of different types of builders, building materials, machines, or buildings.**

BUILDERS: electricians, carpenters, etc.

BUILDING MATERIALS: paint, bricks, etc.

MACHINES: trucks, cement mixers, etc.

BUILDINGS: houses, skyscrapers, etc.